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ABSTRACT

The intention of this manual is to inform school board members of the duties and responsibilities incurred with their election or appointment to a board of education. Specific reference is made to New Jersey; however, the general admonitions are applicable to board members from other states. Information and guidelines deal with the structure of the local board, board meetings, and the organization of the New Jersey School Boards Association. Responsibilities and limitations of board members are discussed in chapters that concern the board and staff, the curriculum, student rights, budgets, buildings and maintenance, labor relations, and public relations. (Author/MLF)

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Basic Boardsmanship

Basic Boardsmanship

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Foreword

The first edition of *Basic Boardsmanship* was published in 1974. It informed board members of the duties and responsibilities of the job they had taken on by virtue of their election or appointment to a board of education.

Since 1974, there have been major legislative actions and numerous legal decisions which have had an impact on public education in New Jersey. This new version of *Basic Boardsmanship* reflects these changes and brings readers up-to-date with existing mandates. It also expands on those issues with which boards are constantly dealing, the policies needed, the procedures recommended, and the relationships involved.

We hope that the knowledge and skills contained in this book help those who are giving so much of their time and effort for the children of New Jersey.

Lloyd J. Newbaker
Executive Director
New Jersey School Boards Association

Trenton, New Jersey
October, 1979

Contents

Chapter One
The Local Board of Education
- The Organization Meeting
- The Educational Governance Chain
- You Are Important
- Policy-making and Administration
- Board Members As Representatives

Chapter Two
The Board Meeting
- Parliamentary Procedure
- The Sunshine Law
- Working As A Group
- Methods of Board Operation
- Information Gathering and Decision Making

Chapter Three
Board and Staff
- The Role of The Superintendent
- The Role of The Board Secretary
- The Role of The Board Attorney
- Board/Staff Relations
- Staff Evaluation
- The Management Team
- Selecting A Superintendent

Chapter Four
Curriculum
- Development And Evaluation
- Censorship
- Chain-Of-Command

Chapter Five
Student Rights
- Special Education
- Student Rights

Chapter Six
Budget
State Aid For Local Districts
CAPS
Line Item Budget
Program Oriented Budgeting
Staff Input
Budget Approval

Chapter Seven
Buildings And Maintenance
Long Range Plans
Projecting Enrollment

Chapter Eight
Labor Relations
Bargaining Units
PERC
Team Make-Up
Determining Parameters
Impasse and Mediation
Contract Administration
Tenure

Chapter Nine
Public Relations
Community Relations
Personal Contact
Program Objectives

Chapter Ten
New Jersey School Boards Association
NJSBA
Executive Office
Communications
Field Service
Governmental Relations
Inservice Education
Labor Relations
Legal
Management Information

1

The Local Board of Education

The Organization Meeting

It all begins at the organization meeting of the board. The legislature specifically delegates to local boards the right to govern themselves, and it is at this yearly meeting that the members who will lead the board for the coming year are determined.

After the new and re-elected members are sworn in, elections are held for a board president and vice-president. Experienced members should have taken the time, prior to the meeting, to explain to new board members their local procedure for the election process. Some boards have a policy, written or unwritten, that the vice-president automatically moves up to the presidency. Others have a rotation system based on board seniority. Most boards, however, have an open process where anyone interested is eligible, nominations are taken, discussion is held, and the majority elects the new officers. Court rulings, by the way, have upheld closed session discussion on the nominees, as long as the actual vote is held in public.

There may be heavy politicking or a general consensus for the presidency and vice-presidency. Some board members actively seek these positions and find them very rewarding. There are no rules with regard to whom should be elected. Because positions of leadership are time-consuming, those elected should have the time to devote. And, because the president, as the major spokesperson for the board at meetings, symbolizes that board to the public, he/she should communicate an attitude of openness and integrity.

The authority of the president of a board of education is no greater than the authority of any individual member. In practice, he/she may be allowed more authority by the members because of a need to make "small" decisions outside of regular meetings. The president is in frequent, if not daily, contact with the superintendent to plan agendas and discuss long range plans for board meetings. However, all board members should make certain they are informed of any "small" decisions made by the board president. Mail addressed to the board is often sent to the board president. Such items should be routinely shared with the rest of the board at their regular meetings.

The Educational Governance Chain

When you are sworn in as a school board member, you take an oath to "faithfully, impartially, and justly . . . . . support and uphold the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of New Jersey." Board of education members are elected *state* officials.

The New Jersey Constitution clearly and unequivocally places prime and absolute responsibility for education upon the State Legislature. The Legislature may not delegate or abdicate to others its exclusive function to make the law, but it may delegate to governmental agencies or public officials the power and function to make subordinate rules or orders within the standards and policies of the Legislature. To the extent that "local control" has been taken to mean that the educational function of government is controlled exclusively at the local level, the notion of home rule becomes an unwarranted myth. In fact, New Jersey's educational system is based on a concept of *lay* control, not *local* control, and the exercise of that power is shared among officials at all levels of government.

The general supervision and control of public education, except for higher education, is vested in the State Board of Education. This Board consists of twelve members appointed by the Governor, with the consent of the Senate, for six year terms; and a Commissioner of Educa-

tion appointed by the Governor, with the consent of the Senate for a five year term. The Commissioner administers the State Department of Education.

In each county, there is a county superintendent, appointed by the Commissioner, with the consent of the State Board, for a three year term. The county superintendent is required to examine all the schools in the county by visitation and to keep informed of the districts' management, courses of study, budget, and building repairs. He/she reports annually to the Commissioner on his/her findings.

There are 596 operating school districts in New Jersey and they are governed through the supervision and control of the local board of education. Since boards of education are created by statute to perform a state function at a local level, their powers are derived from the Legislature and not from the people of their local community. Boards of education can perform only those acts for which express or implied authority exists in state law or in the rules and regulations of the State Board of Education. Meetings of a board, under the Sunshine Law, must be held in public with certain specific exceptions. These include discussions of individual staff members, negotiations, and legal matters among others. Boards must meet to transact business at least once every two months, though the general rule is a formal monthly meeting and weekly work meetings.

New Jersey's education laws contain special provisions for the maintenance of vocational education at the county level. These schools also have a board of education made up of five members, one of whom must be the county superintendent. County special services schools for the education and treatment of handicapped children within the county may also be established by the County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

YOU Are Important

New board members are sometimes reluctant to participate fully in board discussions. They feel their inexperience disqualifies them in some way. Not true!! Your

decision-making ability is as good as anyone else's. Diligent reading of materials sent to board members and close attention to and participation in discussions make everyone's ideas equally important. Your opinion, open to others, is as valid as the longest serving member of the board. By keeping yourself informed and showing an active interest in learning, you will quickly take your full place as a member of the board of education.

Policy-making and Administration

The board is a policy-making body. The board of education makes policy and the administrators administer those policies to run the schools. An effective board member understands the difference between policy and administration.

What is policy? The word is often misused to mean understandings, regulations, traditions, or statutes. A board member will say, "Our board has a policy of trying not to let our meetings run too late." What he really means is that they have an understanding or a practice.

A policy is not a precise course of action: the precise course of action is administrative. A policy is not a restatement of statute, although all policies must comply with the law. A policy is not a routine board decision, although all decisions should arise from board policy. A policy is not a job description or personnel procedure, nor is it a board bylaw.

The definition of a policy, adopted by the NJSBA Delegate Assembly of May, 1976, is:

> A school board policy is a statement of a district's philosophy and goals for a specific topic. The statement should include what the policy is, its purpose, and who it will affect.
>
> Administrative rules and regulations should be drafted under the direction of the chief school administrator to implement the philosophy and goals of the policy statement. They should indicate a method

of evaluation and are subject to final approval by the board of education.

The school district policy manual, in order to be pertinent and effective, should be reviewed and evaluated every year.

Policy is the written expression of the board's desires for the district's children. The policy statements of the board serve as a guide to the superintendent and provide him with direction, a secure basis for decision-making, and an imperative for action. A clearly defined and expressed policy helps eliminate ambiguity and confusion between the board and its chief administrator and goes a long way toward insuring a smoothly operating school system.

Very simple. Very obvious. Very straightforward. Absolutely not! Everybody may agree with the above definitions. The problem for boards of education and administrators lies in determining where policy-making ends and administration begins. The line separating policy and administration is like the Equator. You know it is there but it can't be seen. Because it can't be seen, board members and administrators place it in different places for different issues, depending on their own beliefs and biases. Sometimes policy can expand into administration or vice versa; sometimes the two seem to merge and become one.

Indeed, the line will change from district to district. What may be the board's policy-making prerogative in district A may be left strictly to the superintendent in district B. And where district C administrators may have free rein in curriculum development, district D board members will make sure that area falls within their policy-making authority.

The proper development, use, and annual revision of a policy book in every school district will do more than almost anything else to cut down on the misunderstandings and bad feelings that can occur between boards and their chief administrators. It is important to note that the policy manual of a board of education is not a static document. Constant review and development are necessary to keep it current with district practice. One of the most important functions of a board of education is to

schedule a review of their policy book on at least a yearly basis.

Board Member as Representative

In your role as a board member, whom do you represent? Some people run for board positions because they feel they represent a particular point of view or a particular group. Others may be appointed to the board to provide "balance" or representation from a cross-section of the community.

If you feel that you are on the board to represent specific groups or particular interests—forget it! All board members represent the entire district, not just the area in which they reside or where their supporters live. Many times you will feel torn between programs which you favor and programs which serve the greater need. In the long run, the welfare of the district as a whole should never be sacrificed for one portion. Personal feelings must be laced with objectivity. A board member has a responsibility to listen to all the people of his community and to explain to those with a special point of view the needs of the school system as a whole. It is the way board members should respond and, in the end, it is the most gratifying. You speak for ALL of the children!

2

The Board Meeting

Parliamentary Procedure

Parlimentary procedure is not a four letter word, but reaction to it is often the same as if it were. "Too complicated!" "Unnecessary!" "Stifles discussion!" These are only a few of the prevalent opinions. In reality, however, none of them is accurate.

Parliamentary procedure is to a group meeting what a constitution is to a government, or laws to a municipality. Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules which help ensure that the decision-making operations of the group are clear, fair, and legal.

Legislative groups of all kinds have found it desirable to employ a set of rules of procedure to govern their deliberations. Boards of education are no exception. Such rules serve very real and necessary functions in the workings of a board.

The use of a code of procedure helps insure that decisions are reached in an orderly fashion. Without such a code, great difficulty can be experienced in maintaining order in the group or in seeing that matters of business are given their due. Rules of procedure can increase efficiency in the conduct of business. Without them there would be great difficulty in keeping track of particular items and proposed modifications to them. A set of rules can help insure basic democratic processes. Such rules guarantee that the majority shall triumph, but at the same time, protect the rights of the minority.

Communication is made smoother by adherence to a set of rules of procedure. It is easier for members of a board to discuss issues within the framework of a set of rules.

Responsibility for the introduction of motions, the manner in which the members of the board vote, and the nature of the debate on matters can be easily understood if a formal set of rules of procedure are followed.

It is important for a board of education to adopt a policy on the procedures they will follow. For boards of education, the sources of rules used in the conduct of business generally derive from several places. The provisions of the State School Code prescribe certain things about the conduct of business. Provision is made in this Code for public sessions, for example, and certain kinds of agenda items are prescribed, such as the hiring of teachers and the adoption of textbooks.

A board's own set of written rules also, of course, pertain. Many boards have already adopted in their policy book guidelines for the conduct of their meetings. Sometimes in addition to this policy statement, the board may adopt a specific set of rules of procedure designed to cover the operation of their meetings. Such a set of rules might include, for example, some references to the responsibilities of the president, the starting time of the meeting, and a limit to meeting length. The customs of a local district also provide guidelines to its operations. The nature of the debate on an issue may follow whatever the practice of the board has been up to that time. Such practices may, however, serve to emphasize the need for written procedures.

Finally, boards of education tend to rely like other groups, upon a standard set of rules of procedure. Contrary to popular opinion, it need not be Robert's Rules of Order. Indeed, these are so detailed that they are probably not the best for school boards. NJSBA has recommended *Parliamentary Procedure At A Glance*, by O. Garfield Jones, published by Hawthorne Books, New York. It is compact, simplified, and based on common sense.

The Sunshine Law

In October, 1975, the Open Public Meetings Act,

commonly known as the Sunshine Law, went into effect in New Jersey. All boards of education, as well as almost all other public bodies, fall under its provisions. Although there was concern at the time of enactment, among elected officials, that it would affect honest deliberations, the law has actually become a mechanism for strengthening the relationship between boards and their local communities.

The Sunshine Law covers all public bodies organized by law and empowered to spend public funds or affect people's rights. Except for specific listed exemptions, all discussions and official actions of the public body must take place in public. The community gains access to all phases of deliberation, policy formation and decision-making. The specific statutory exemptions relate only to those matters where the public interest would be endangered or the personal privacy or guaranteed rights of an individual would be invaded.

In passing the Sunshine Law, the Legislature commented that secrecy in government undermines public faith and limits public participation in affairs which concern them. All board of education meetings are covered under the law if they are open to or attended by a majority of the members.

Questions frequently arise concerning board committees and their coverage under the Sunshine Law. If a committee meeting is open to or attended by a majority of the board, then it must also be open to the public. If less than a majority of the board may attend, then the meeting can be closed. This assumes, however, that the nature of the committee's work is to investigate, study, and report back to the full board any recommendations. Where committee decisions are binding on the entire board, those meetings must be announced and open.

For example, if an agenda committee composed of less than an effective majority serves a purely administrative function and merely determines the items of dicussion for agenda purposes, the meeting need not be open. But, if the committee discusses each item and makes decisions on the merits and then has the authority to determine whether or

not an item appears on a meeting agenda, this committee is acting in more than an advisory capacity and would be subject to the provisions of the Sunshine Law. The nature and extent of authority possessed by a committee are the determining factors in deciding whether or not the meeting must be open to the public.

Having an open meeting, however, does not mean that those present must be allowed to address the board. The right of the public to attend a meeting should not be confused with their right to speak. A board of education always retains the authority to permit, regulate, or prohibit active participation by the public in its meetings.

To assist in successful compliance with the Sunshine Law, a board should include in its policy manual a statement incorporating its philosophy concerning public participation at meetings, establish procedures and times for the public to address the board, and methods of distribution of the agenda and related meeting materials.

More detailed information on the specifics of the law, including emergency meetings, minutes, and those subjects which may be discussed in closed sessions, can be found in Volume I of this series—*Basic School Law.*

Working as a Group

An individual board member has no legal status other than that of an ordinary citizen except when sitting with the rest of the board in a legally constituted meeting. A board, by law, must work together to make decisions. Thus, how they function may often determine how successful their deliberations are. Since no single person possesses all the qualities of a perfect board member, the combination of members on a board of education can create a whole which is truly more than the sum of its parts.

An understanding of group dynamics is vital to the effective functioning of this whole called the board of education. In all interactions there are two major ingredients—content and process. The first ingredient, content, is the subject matter or task with which the group is

dealing. In most situations, the focus of attention of the group is on content. The second ingredient, process, involves what is happening among and to group members while the group is working. Group process, or group dynamics, deals with such items as morale, feeling, atmosphere, influence, participation, leadership struggles, conflict, competition, and cooperation. Awareness of group dynamics will enable each individual member to work more effectively within the group, and thus enhance the operations of the whole.

The way a group works is determined by the manner in which each member approaches his position—the role each one plays in the decision-making process. Generally, these roles can be divided into three categories: task oriented, maintenance oriented, and individual oriented.

A task oriented person concentrates on accomplishing the specific job at hand. Whatever the agenda item, from selecting a superintendent to approving the bill list, a task oriented person will define the problem, encourage ideas to be produced and tested, call for decisions to be reached and approved.

A second category of activities, one which is seldom discussed or thought about, is that emphasized by the maintenance oriented person. Maintenance functions are those activities which tend to build or maintain the group To be able to work effectively at its tasks, every group has a need to build solidarity, cohesiveness, esprit de corps, morale and so forth. Without these, a group will be unable to communicate effectively among themselves and will have a difficult time coming to agreements with which all members feel comfortable.

Then there is a third type of group member, the individual oriented person. Unlike the task oriented person who contributes to accomplishing the work of the group, or the maintenance oriented person who contributes to the morale and cohesiveness of the group, the individual oriented person usually contributes only to the fulfillment of personal needs and, rather than benefiting the group as a whole, actually impedes its progress.

It might seem that a board would be able to work well

at its policy-making responsibilities by concentrating on the task at hand. You will find, however, that maintenance functions are vital to the welfare of the group. Consensus decision-making, as opposed to that of majority rule, is practically impossible without members who actively work at these maintenance functions.

Members of a school board are persons with diverse backgrounds and opinions and they will not always be in agreement on issues that come before them. Each member of a board has the responsibility to see that disagreements do not create personal animosities, which would hamper the work of the group. Each member has an equal right to be heard, and to agree or dissent as his conscience dictates. However, once a decision is reached, all members of the board should support it. Nothing is more damaging to a board, to its internal relations or its prestige with the public, than for individual board members to quarrel publicly with a decision that the board has made. Such action throws doubt on all of the board's efforts, even those the dissenter supports.

Methods of Board Operation

Mostly because of size, many nine member boards in New Jersey function on the committee system, five members boards usually function as a committee of the whole, and seven member boards come down generally on the side of committees. A board working with the committee system may have three members serving in such areas as Personnel, Building and Grounds, Curriculum, Finance, Community Relations, or Student Services. These committees study data and information they have compiled in their areas and make recommendations for action to the entire board at a regular monthly meeting.

A board functioning as a committee of the whole, receives input from the administration or community, studies a matter in concert, and comes to conclusions working together. There are pros and cons to both methods and boards should examine their procedure to be sure what they have developed is based on what is best for them-

selves and their administrators and not just "the way it has always been done."

Arguments *against* board committees include: the board as a whole may never give in-depth consideration to important matters; there may be a tendency for the entire board not to get a detailed report, only the committee's conclusion and recommendation; there can also be a reluctance on the part of the whole board to question the committee's judgment; factionalism and special-interest groups within the board may be promoted, with a long-term committee chairman becoming more important and influential in his area than the other board members; dissension may occur when committee responsibilities overlap; work generated for the central office staff is considerably increased with a committee system; and, finally, the committee system seems to encourage boards to involve themselves in administrative matters. Arguments *for* board committees include: the use of special talents of board members; special investigations of a topic can be done without taking up the time of the full board; and, under the Sunshine Law, a committee composed of less than a majority of the board may meet in private session without notice to the public. This provides an opportunity for investigation, study and analysis of sensitive issues before they reach the public. Of course, action cannot be taken by such a committee and the law requires that the whole board be involved in public review of the committee's recommendations and in the final action.

Advantages of a committee of the whole include: the professional staff, who have the time, training and expertise, does the research for agenda items; the complete board gets all of the information at the same time and shares in the discussion, hearing all views from all board members and the superintendent before coming to any conclusion; the position of the superintendent is clearer as an administrator implementing board policy and bringing information to the board for further policy decisions; the role of the board is also clarified as a policy-making body, without getting involved in truly administrative items. And finally, students and parents are entitled to the best

thinking of the whole board before decisions are made affecting the educational system.

Information Gathering and Decision Making

Before a motion is voted on at a monthly public meeting, the issues involved should have been thoroughly discussed and reviewed to be certain that all avenues have been investigated and all alternatives considered. Such discussions will probably have taken place at prior work sessions, either in public or in closed session, depending upon the item. For these discussions to be fruitful, board members should have sufficient information and background material on which to base their questions. Only when all questions are answered can a decision be reached with which all board members will feel satisfied. Only when all questions are answered, will board members fully understand the issue so as to be able to explain and defend their actions to the community.

The gathering of background information for meeting agenda items is probably the most important part of a superintendent's responsibility in his relationship with the board. As the chief advisor to the board, the superintendent should provide them with accurate and complete information on every issue they are discussing and should point out to them any alternatives.

An effective board member will soon discover that to get the right answers, he must ask the right questions. What decisions are called for? Are these decisions within the board's legal power? What short-term and long-range impact will any alternatives have on the school system and community? How will the students and staff be affected? What are the benefits and drawbacks to each alternative? Who will be responsible for implementing the decision? How much will each alternative cost? Background material should be available to the board during discussion which will provide answers to these questions and others which might occur. Administrators should be asked to return at a future meeting with information on unanswered questions. Decisions should be postponed until this is done.

A board member should suspend judgment until all the facts are available and all opinions heard, both administrative and from other board members. Issues of large impact might call for a public hearing so that the community can be heard, also. Once all the evidence is in and the discussion over, the board member should make up his own mind, share responsibility for the board decision, and weather any criticism calmly. It will not take long to discover that you can never please all of the people all of the time. If you can, in your own good conscience, please yourself and honestly feel that your decisions are the best for all the students in all of the community, you will be a successful and respected member of your board of education.

3

Board and Staff

The Role of The Superintendent

The relationship between the board and the superintendent is one of the most critical factors in determining how well a school system operates. The board should trust its superintendent, have respect for his professional training and experience, be confident in his ability to administer the district, and request his recommendations on issues under discussion. The superintendent, in turn, should give the board his loyalty, his best advice on matters under advisement, and provide the most competent management of the schools. In working together, both the board and the superintendent must be conscious of each other's role and areas of responsibility.

Most often, when conflicts arise between a board and its superintendent, it is because of a misunderstanding regarding whose responsibility it is to carry out a task or make a decision. A clear understanding of the role of the superintendent will go a long way in preventing such misunderstandings.

This role can be divided generally into three areas. He is the chief advisor to the board of education; he is the executive officer of the school district; and he is the educational leader of the community.

As the chief advisor to the board, the superintendent should be consulted for background materials, alternatives, suggestions, and recommendations before decisions are made. He will often bring to the attention of the board those things which require board discussion and/or action. He has the responsibility of keeping the board briefed on district operations and may ask other district

staff to attend board meetings to give reports on particular items. The superintendent should keep the board informed of problems occuring in the district, especially if they are likely to turn up in the form of community protests at meetings. (In turn, board members should keep the superintendent informed when they hear of an incident which is likely to come up at a meeting.) School boards will react much more reasonably and calmly when they are prepared for a potential crisis.

As chief advisor, the superintendent should take the lead, along with the board president, in helping new board members acquire the information they need to effectively take up their new responsibilities. Minutes from the past year, all negotiated contracts, a copy of the policy manual, staff handbook and administrative guide, and budget information are some of the materials which should be provided the new member as soon as possible. The superintendent should meet with the new member at their leisure to bring him up-to-date on current issues.

New Jersey Administrative Code 18A:17-20 states that the superintendent "shall have a seat on the board or boards of education employing him and the right to speak on all educational matters at meetings of the board or boards but shall have no vote." Because of his legal position, and the fact that he is held responsible for all acts and actions in the district, a board of education should never meet without the superintendent in attendance. Only if an emergency prevents him being there, or the board is discussing his evaluation and salary, should he be excused. A feeling of trust and confidence between a board and superintendent is basic to the proper management of the system.

As the executive officer of the school district, the superintendent is responsible for administering those policies adopted by the school board. He carries out their decisions. Board members should involve themselves as little as possible in the day to day running of the schools. Perhaps the greatest source of friction between boards and superintendents arises from a board's failure to understand the difference between policy and administration.

Although the line is an elusive one, as we have discussed in Chapter I, generally the board establishes the principles and goals that guide the school system and leaves the superintendent free to observe the principles and achieve the goals in his own way. The board, however, always has the right and duty to require that the superintendent keep them informed on how he is implementing the goals they have given him. Progress reports should be a regular item on meeting agendas. The board must be provided with enough information to know whether the goals are the right ones for the district, whether they need changing, and whether the students are being properly provided for.

As the executive officer, the superintendent should be familiar with the duties and job descriptions of his subordinates so that they can be fairly evaluated. However, he should not be doing their work. As the board's realm is policy-development, so the superintendent's is general administration. Duties should be delegated to the appropriate staff members, while the superintendent concentrates on the overall operation of the district, liaison with outside agencies, and long-range planning for the schools.

The superintendent is also the educational leader of the community. He should remain active in professional education organizations, be familiar with current ideas in education and take the initiative in bringing worthwhile ideas to the attention of the board and townspeople. He is the spokesman for the district in contacts with the county superintendent and the State Department of Education. His public statements will be quoted in newspapers and on radio and television and he will often be looked on as the spokesperson for the board. He will be the speaker at many local organization meetings and at PTA and Home and School functions.

Board members should not resent this public side of the superintendents job. It is part of what they pay him for. He has the time, the expertise, and the experience of dealing with the public from a career in education. Boards might take advantage of the high visibility of a superintendent and encourage his acceptance of speaking engagements. Issues which should be brought before the

public in an informed manner before they break into open confrontation are often handled well in such forums. The possible closing of a school, a major change in curriculum, an elimination of several staff positions—these are items where it is desirable to prepare and inform the public as far in advance as possible. The superintendent can be a major asset to the board which uses him as a prime source of information to the community at these times.

In the long run, the measure of an effective superintendent is not that he is superior in all aspects of his responsibilities, but rather that he has the ability to supplement his skills and buttress his weaknesses with other members of his staff, and has the trust and confidence of his board of education.

The Role of The Board Secretary

The board secretary is the only member of the district staff who reports directly to the board, rather than to the superintendent. Some superintendents may serve in a dual capacity as board secretary; a few board members have taken on the secretary's responsibilities, though they are not allowed to receive compensation; but in most districts the board secretary is the business administrator or the assistant superintendent for business. They report to the board on their secretarial duties and to the superintendent on their fiscal responsibilities in districts with unit control.

Every board of education must have a board secretary to perform those duties mandated by law. It is the secretary's responsibility to notify board members of all meetings and to insure that the Sunshine Law is followed with regard to these meetings. He keeps all accounts of the district's financial transactions and is responsible for presenting all such information to the board—from bill lists to quarterly and annual audits. The board secretary may administer oaths and, in that capacity, swears in all new and returning board members at the organization meeting. He also chairs that meeting initially, takes the nominations for board president, and swears him/her in before turning the meeting over to the new presiding officer.

He is responsible for conducting all school elections. He receives the petitions, conducts the drawing for position, ascertains all polling equipment is in place and working, and tallies and verifies the vote. Complete information on the board secretary's duties, with statutory citations, can be found in *Basic School Law*.

The Role of The Board Attorney

The laws governing school districts have become increasingly complex in recent years. Not only rules and regulations from the State Department, but legislation and court decisions relating to education have been multiplying at a geometric rate. It is impossible for a board member or administrator to keep up with and understand all the legal ramifications of these mandates on them.

Every school district, no matter how small, should retain a board attorney to advise them on legal questions. It may be tempting to use a board member who happens to be an attorney, but education law is as specialized as tax law or divorce law. An attorney not working regularly in the field will not be familiar enough with current rulings to be valuable to a board of education. Attorneys can be hired on a yearly retainer basis to attend monthly public meetings, answer questions which arise, and examine all contracts before they are entered into by the board. He would also provide legal representation for board members and appropriate staff. He should certainly go over all negotiated contracts with the bargaining units of a district before these are approved in public meeting.

There is sometimes a reluctance on the part of board members to have their attorney present at monthly board meetings, mostly due to what they deem an unnecessary expenditure of money. However, the few times he may prevent the board from passing an illegal motion or committing themselves verbally to something which could cause a future legal problem, will more than make up for the increase in the retainer.

The board attorney should also be consulted when revising or adding to the board's policy manual. His

expertise makes his use as a consultant on all legal questions which confront the board a necessity for every school district.

Board/Staff Relations

Board members take their place on their local boards with different knowledge about and experience with the individual schools and staff within their district. Some may have several children who have gone through all grade levels, been active in the PTA and become familiar with many administrators and teachers along the way. Others may have young children and only be familiar with one or two teachers; and still others may have no children in the district's schools and be unfamiliar with all staff and administrators outside of the central office or superintendent. Whichever may be the case, it is important that school board members make, as one of their major goals, an effort to familiarize themselves with their school system. They should take the time to meet with the individual principals, find out what the educational philosophies of these administrators are and how they implement these philosophies into their schools. Learn about pilot programs that individual staff members may be employing and how they are progressing. Board members should be familiar with the various departments existing in their secondary schools in K-12 districts. They should know the department chairpersons and how they function.

Some of this information will come in briefings new board members receive when they come onto a board. However, most of it can only be gained by personal visits to the schools and meetings with the people involved. But how to visit the schools. Do you just drop in? Do you ask the superintendent's permission? The answer to both questions is "No." You do not just drop in on a school nor do you need your superintendent's permission to visit. You should call the principal and tell him that you would like to meet with him, see his building, and take the opportunity to get to know him. With a high school, you might mention that you would also like to meet sometime with

the department chairpersons, at their convenience, to become more familiar with their positions and specialties. The principal will let you know when is convenient. You could also, if you wish, ask the superintendent to make arrangements for you to visit the schools, and let him set up the appointments. Certainly, you should let him know, as a matter of courtesy, that you are visiting schools, no matter who makes the arrangements. The principal will tell him about your visit, in any event.

Several years ago a parent, who had been active in the PTA and a frequent visitor to her children's school as an aide and involved parent, was elected to her local board of education. About a week after the election, as she was entering the school for a conference with her child's teacher, the principal called her into his office. He congratulated her on her election and then said, "I want you to know that you are as welcome now as you have always been to visit us, but you should also know that you will be looked at differently by the staff. Now you are member of the board of education and you can never be only a parent again." The parent was disturbed by this because, in this school, with her children's teachers, she did not want to be perceived as a board member. The reality is, however, that teachers and administrators, no matter what your previous relations with them have been, will now see you first as a board member. Only if you accept this, understand it, and learn how to deal with it, will you be able to continue to meet with personnel in your district in a relaxed and open manner.

It should be emphasized here, again, that even though your staff may see you as a board member, you have no legal status in that role except when sitting with the other board members in a formal meeting. And though you may be tempted to comment to administrators or staff about ideas you may have for changes or improvements, you should not. Neither should you visit schools or classrooms with the idea of evaluating any staff member. You are there as a student yourself, to learn more about this district you are now serving. The information you gain and observations you make will serve you in the future as

background to matters you will be discussing. Materials brought to you for discussion and decision-making will be clearer to you with the knowledge of the schools you have learned from your visits.

Some staff members may come to you with problems or complaints, either because you are friends outside of your individual positions or because they think you will be sympathetic. In any case, it is vital that you make clear to them that you are not the proper person for them to see. There is a chain-of-command in every school system along with a grievance procedure in every union contract. All staff members should follow procedures set down contractually or in the staff manuals. If board members attempt to go around these procedures, the result will be morale problems for the staff, a lack of credibility for the administrators, and a lack of trust for the board member. Involving oneself with personnel matters outside of a regular board meeting is one of the most regrettable examples of a board member crossing the line from policy-making to administration.

Staff Evaluation

We have discussed how the proper gathering of information is necessary prior to any decision-making on the part of the board. This is especially true in the area of staff evaluations. In determining whether to retain or dismiss non-tenured personnel, whether to withhold raises or increments of tenured staff members, and what the percentage of increase for non-union people will be, the board should take into consideration evaluations made by the staff member's superior.

Evaluating staff is probably the most important part of an administrator's or supervisor's job. Their evaluations should encourage professional excellence, improve the skills of the person being evaluated, improve student learning, and provide a basis for the review of the past year's performance.

A properly written evaluation, to be effective, should tell the person being evaluated how well he has ac-

complished the goals and objectives given him last year, what the goals and objectives will be for the coming year, what areas of performance are above average or outstanding, what areas of performance need improvement, and what in-service programs will be provided in order to make this improvement. The evaluation should include specific instances which the administrator or supervisor has observed as indicators of the various comments in the evaluation. An evaluation should be a positive document, used to improve the performance of the staff member.

Boards of education should be familiar with the evaluation procedures for their district. These procedures must be in agreement with NJAC Code 6:3-1.21 as adopted by the New Jersey State Board of Education. A detailed examination and explanation of the requirements under this Code can be found in the New Jersey School Boards Association/Research For Better Schools book, *School Staff Evaluation in New Jersey*, published in February, 1979.

The first criterion for a good evaluation is that it spell out the responsibilities of the person being evaluated. For this, the evaluator should have a job description for everyone he is evaluating. If you don't know what a person is supposed to be doing, how can you determine whether or not he is doing it well? Also, if a person in a position is not sure what is required of him, how can he make an effort to fulfill any requirements. Board members should ascertain whether or not there are job descriptions in their district for all positions and, if not, direct the superintendent to have them written. Be familiar with the job descriptions of your staff. They should be specific without being rigid. Jobs change as student and district needs change. Job descriptions should be reviewed on a regular basis, in consultation with those in the jobs, to insure they are current and useful. Because of this managerial need for review and possible change, job descriptions should *never* be included in any unit contract.

After administrators and supervisors have completed their evaluations and made their recommendations to the Superintendent, what next? Where does a board of educa-

tion fit into the evaluation procedure? In the month or so prior to April 30, the superintendent should meet with the board in closed session to discuss the recommendations he has received. The board should review these recommendations, questioning the superintendent about any out of the ordinary, bringing to his attention items they are aware of that have not been mentioned, and be certain that all their concerns are addressed. The board must realize, however, that they are lay persons and that the evaluations have been made by trained professionals. Generally speaking, only if there are factual reasons for disapproving any of the superintendent's recommendations should the board do so. Hearsay comments from members of the community and telephone rumors from neighbors are not alone grounds for disciplinary actions against staff members.

Should board members actually read the evaluation reports themselves? They certainly have the legal right to see them, but not usually the need. Again, generally speaking, only if the board cannot agree with the superintendent's recommendation should they ask to see the actual evaluation.

Maintaining a high quality staff is important. Demanding effective and accurate evaluations of this staff from administrators and supervisors is the best way for a board to insure high quality is being maintained. And providing for the training of the evaluators is the best way for a board to insure effective and accurate evaluations. Evaluation training is one area which should not be skimped on when preparing a school budget.

The Management Team

Most people in education agree that no district can be run by the school board alone or even by a superintendent in conjunction with the board. Because board members are lay persons and superintendents cannot be all things to all people at all times, districts are best run by a management team. In a management team, administrators, along with the superintendent and the board, have meaningful input to the development and implementation of policy and

procedure for the school system. The first and foremost aspect of the team concept is participatory management.

The difference of opinion that may arise when speaking of the management team comes with the team makeup. The inclusion of central office personnel causes little problem. It is obvious that assistant superintendents in charge of curriculum, personnel, and business would be involved in management decisions. Their expertise and daily experience make their thinking necessary before any decisions are made. But what about principals?

A true management team includes the district's principals. They are included because the board and superintendent recognize the dependence of the central office on the building managers for implementation of policies and procedures. Their involvement before such policies and procedures are determined increases the likelihood of success. What people worked to develop they will work to carry out.

The addition of principals to the management team also recognizes their position on the district firing line. They are the first to be contacted by parents and students with complaints and concerns. They are also the people most responsible for contract administration—the carrying out of the terms and conditions agreed to in negotiations by the board. They know what works and what does not in the schools. They know what is lacking and what is succeeding. A school system is a combination of its parts—the individual schools. The managers of those schools should be part of the management team governing the entire system.

Selecting a Superintendent

The day comes in the life of every board of education, though not necessarily in the term of every board member, when a new superintendent of schools must be selected. With the current average length of service for superintendents in New Jersey getting shorter, the likelihood becomes increasingly greater. The selection of a superintendent is the most crucial decision that any board of

education will make. The role of the superintendent in terms of board relations, community relations, staff relations, educational leadership, financial management, and personal qualities makes selection of the right person for each district of vital importance. Each board must determine for itself exactly what personal qualities and educational background they will require. Having determined these, how do they procede in the selection process?

There are three ways of selecting a new superintendent. The board can do it themselves; a committee of community leaders can be formed to do the initial screening and interviewing; or an outside consultant can be hired to handle the entire process up to and including making final recommendations to the board on two or three finalists. If the board decides to handle the process themselves, or wishes to use a committee of community members, they can receive valuable help in setting up rules and procedures from NJSBA's Management Information Department and their Field Service Representative.

Whatever the method, the board must decide whether the search for candidates will remain within the district, within the state, or be conducted nationally. If the current superintendent will not be remaining in office until a new superintendent is hired, then provisions must be made to appoint an acting superintendent until the search and appointment of the new person is completed. When the board has decided on the candidate to whom they wish to offer the job, they should do so but make no public announcement until he has accepted. Many problems have developed in districts because it was known that the superintendent hired was the second or third choice of the school board.

The hiring of a new superintendent is one of two actions a board takes where an effort should be made to achieve consensus. (The other is approval of the budget.) If at all possible, the board should be unanimous in its selection. This unanimity will start the new superintendent off assured of the undivided loyalty and support of the board of education.

4

Curriculum

Development and Evaluation

"A board of education has three fundamental responsibilities: to approve what is to be taught, to make sure that what is supposed to be taught is being learned, and to insure that the resources needed for learning are available and being used efficiently." This statement from the NJSBA/RBS Manual on *Roles and Responsibilities of Boards of Education Relative to Thorough and Efficient Legislation* is an excellent summary of the board's role in curriculum development and evaluation.

In developing curriculum, board members should remember that they are lay people and that their administrators and staff are the experts with the knowledge of how to determine students needs and the background from which to develop courses and programs to fill those needs. Yet boards must be involved in developing and approving curriculum because, in the end, it is the board of education that is held accountable for the quality of education in their district. Not only are boards held accountable by the citizens of their community, but by law. Title 18A states, "No course of study shall be adopted or altered except by the recorded roll call majority vote of the full membership of the board of education of the district." Remember this if your superintendent introduces a new program without board approval, explaining that it is his administrative prerogative. The statute goes on to state, "The school board is responsible for production of a thorough and efficient school system and has a continuing obligation to adopt and alter courses of study."

How do the lay members of a board of education carry

out these responsibilities? In practice, the superintendent usually brings to the board a recommendation, based on his staff's experience or study, to initiate a new course of study or revise an old one. If the board has, in the past, adopted a policy on addition or revision of courses of study, they would now determine whether the superintendent's recommendation meets the criteria of that policy. The adoption of such a policy on curriculum development should be a high priority item for those boards without one. Criteria ideally would include (1) a statement of district educational goals the recommended program is designed to meet (2) a statement on how the course, if a revision, improves upon the one now in use (3) the cost of the new program in terms of personnel and materials and whether it is within budget allotments (4) evaluative criteria to be used to measure pupil progress toward the goals intended, and (5) timelines for such evaluations. Handling curricular recommendations in this manner leaves little room for misunderstandings and less room for important details to fall between the cracks of board and administrative areas of responsibility.

In the T & E process, as set down by the legislature and the State Department of Education, a board of education must first adopt district and school goals and then set the objectives and standards to meet those goals. These objectives and standards should be set for each grade level and subject area, as well as for individual students. Minimum proficiency levels should be established also. The entire process should be done in concert with community and staff. The superintendent will then identify and assess districts needs in order to achieve the objectives, and develop the educational programs indicated by those needs for the board of education to approve. In all of these steps, evaluative procedures should be included, not only for the development of standards and the needs assessment, but in the adoption of all curricular programs.

This last is most important! Too often courses of study are implemented in a school system without built-in means of evaluating their successes and/or failures. Program evaluation should start with day one and be designed

to cover the course's progress through the year, along with the progress of the students enrolled in the program. A year-end overall review of the data gathered will then serve as a major determinant of the continuation, revision, or deletion of the course for the following school year. Some valid questions board members should ask their superintendent about any district program are, "How is it to be evaluated?" "What use will be made of the results of the evaluation?" "What criteria are included in the evaluative instrument?"

Schools exist so that students may learn. The education students receive from their schools is a board of education's raison d'etre. Don't let it go by default.

Censorship

In the curricular area, a board can find itself embroiled in controversy over courses of study or individual books required for student reading. Parents sometimes become disturbed by books or assignments brought home by their children. Everyone has read of instances in the United States where boards have reacted emotionally regarding the books available in their schools or libraries: from book burnings in South Dakota to wholesale banning of authors in Long Island. The likelihood of disagreement and personal bias taking the place of rational decisions based on the need for the most effective teaching materials makes the adoption of a board policy on selection of textbooks most urgent. Title 18A speaks to this also: "Textbooks shall be selected by the recorded roll call majority vote of the full membership of the board of education of the district and they and other school supplies shall be furnished free of cost for use by all pupils in the public schools . . .".

To eliminate board of education members acting individually or inconsistently on these issues, policies on textbook selection and course materials should be adopted. Such policies should include statements that the books and materials must be relevant to the course of study for which they are assigned; that professional staff

have participated in the selection process; that the texts be of recent date and follow the rulings regarding sexism in educational materials. The policy should also, of course, require periodic re-evaluation by the staff of all textbooks in use.

Generally speaking, when a superintendent brings textbook recommendations to the board for approval, those books have been through much study and evaluation by the staff, from teacher and department chairpersons through principal and central office administration. An individual board member should look long and hard at his personal biases before substituting a layman's opinion for professional knowledge and experience.

Chain-of-Command

Along these same lines, boards of education should have in their policies a specific chain-of-command for parents who have a problem or complaint. Such a policy can be thought of as a grievance procedure for non-staff people. When the chain-of-command is used properly by parents, board members, administrators and staff, it improves communication, aids in finding amicable solutions to misunderstandings and helps everyone in the district do a better job. The normal chain-of-command runs from the classroom teacher through the principals to central office administrators to the superintendent and, finally, to the board.

Members of the general public sometimes do not understand the reasons for this procedure. Or they would rather just go right to the top. Rarely do they understand the relationship of the board to the functioning of the school system. Going around someone or over their head undermines the authority of all personnel in between and destroys communications.

When a board member is approached by a parent with what seems to be a valid problem, they should always listen. After having determined where the problem lies, the proper procedure for working within channels can be described and the recommendation made that such pro-

cedure be followed. The basis for most reluctance on the part of parents to handle their own complaints is expressed in their statement, "They will take it out on my child." It is, unfortunately, an unshakeable belief held by many, including some board members, that bringing a concern to a teacher or principal will cause that teacher or principal to unleash his anger at the complaining parent on the child. It is an unfortunate belief because it is untrue!

A much more common expression is a much truer one —"It is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease." The parents who come in to talk say, by their presence, that they care what happens to their child. That is the child who staff and administrators will see to first. It is, after all, human nature to pay attention to those you feel are paying attention to you. The effective parent, of course, comes to any discussion, no matter the cause, calmly and with as open a mind as is possible in the particular situation.

If you as a board member can successfully get this fact across to the parents in your community, you will have more than justified your membership on the board.

5

Student Rights

Special Education

In April, 1977, then Secretary of HEW, Joseph A. Califano, Jr., signed the regulations which fully implemented Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Public Law 93-112. The Act was called "a Civil Rights Act for the Disabled" and its impact on boards of education is great.

In a Fact Sheet issued in July, 1977, HEW explained for public school administrators how the Section 504 regulation would affect their institutions. Section 504 states that: "No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States. . . .shall, solely, by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." The term 'handicapped' includes such diseases or conditions as speech, hearing, visual and orthopedic impairments, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, mental retardation, emotional illness, and specific learning disabilities such as perceptual handicaps, dyslexia, minimal brain dysfunction, and developmental phasia.

In accordance with a formal opinion of the Attorney General of the United States, alcohol and drug addicts are also considered handicapped individuals. Physical and mental impairments do not constitute a handicap, however, unless they are severe enough to substantially limit one or more of the major life functions.

The Fact Sheet explains that an appropriate education can be afforded by many different methods, including

use of regular classes with or without aides, depending on need; in private or public homes or institutions; or through a combination of such methods, so long as handicapped and nonhandicapped students are educated together to the maximum extent possible and educationally sound. The result intended is that educational programs that are best suited to the individual needs of the handicapped student be provided for him.

HEW emphasizes that, where a handicapped student is so disruptive that education of other students in the classroom is impaired, the student can be assigned to special classes. They state that the rule of common sense should be applied in all cases.

The regulations provide that programs must be accessible to handicapped persons. They do not require that every building or part of a building be accessible, but that a program as a whole be accessible. Structural changes to make a program accessible must be made only if alternatives, such as reassignments to accessible locations, are not possible.

School board members have special responsibilities in this area. Besides complying with the accessibility requirements (recipients of federal aid are given three years to complete structural changes to physical plants—from the April, 1977 date), there are several other requirements which they should ascertain have been fulfilled in their districts. All unserved handicapped children must be located and identified annually; all handicapped children must be given free appropriate public education regardless of the nature or severity of the handicap, including coverage of nonmedical care and room and board where residential placement is required; handicapped children must be educated with nonhandicapped students to the maximum extent possible and educationally sound; there must be comparability of facilities, services and activities for handicapped and nonhandicapped students; classification and placement procedures must be evaluated regularly to insure that they are proper and that due process is being followed; and handicapped students must be given equal opportunity for participation in nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities.

These are serious responsibilities on school districts and boards should take them seriously. Annual reports from superintendents might serve to keep board members aware of the implementation of these mandates in their schools. We owe those children less fortunate no less an educational opportunity than we provide to their brothers and sisters.

Student Rights

In the early days of our country, schools had little problem with their students. If you didn't do what the teacher said, you would be summarily thrown out of school. Due process rights for students have come a long way since our country's beginnings and, with court decisions in the area proliferating, the end does not appear to be in sight.

Suspension and expulsion procedures alone have taken up much court time in recent years. Notice to students, explanation of charges, appeal proceedings before the board, all of these are now mandated depending upon the circumstances. *What Every School Board Member Should Know About Basic School Law* explains clearly and thoroughly what board responsibilities are in this area. Board members should make sure that their school districts are complying with the law and that their board attorney keeps them up-to-date on current decisions in this area.

In 1867 New Jersey became the first state to abolish corporal punishment in the public schools and no other state rushed to follow our lead until 1972 when Massachusetts became #2. Maine has since joined the prohibitionists and Hawaii has banned corporal punishment temporarily (as of July, 1979) pending a study. New York City and Chicago are among the few individual districts which forbid corporal punishment. The Puritan view of the "hickory stick" method of teaching dies hard.

Board members are cautioned about applying "prior restraint" restrictions to student publications. As stated in *Basic School Law*, "the weight of authority suggests . . . . that restraints on distribution of student literature will be

subjected to strict judicial scrutiny. While the courts have indicated that some narrowly drawn restraints will be upheld, the board bears a heavy burden in justifying their legality. A policy which would restrict publication and circulation on school property to literature prepared under school sponsorship and supervision is an unlawful and improper restraint upon students' rights of free expression." For a full discussion of this issue, board members are referred to *Basic School Law*.

Other student rights issues discussed in that book with which board members should be familiar, are hair length and dress codes, the rights of parents to see their children's records, and student searches.

Boards should refer whenever necessary to their board attorney to ensure that they are following current law in all areas of due process for students. Many expensive law suits could have been prevented by asking the right questions first.

6

Budget

State Aid For Local Districts

A school budget should be the financial expression of a district's educational aspirations for its students. It is probably the single most important item a board will decide upon in any year of decision-making.

As a management tool, prepared each year to show how a school system's financial resources will be used, the school budget should indicate both revenue sources and expenditures. There are several sources of revenues. In New Jersey, despite the income tax, local district taxes are still the main source of budget monies.

Since the T & E Law, however, state aid to local districts has been increased from an average of 28% to an average of 40%. The actual percentage of state aid to any district, however, varies from less than 5% in some districts to almost 90% in others. This variation stems from the fact that state aid is equalized in most categories, with poorer districts receiving much more than the wealthier districts. The intent is to equalize the resources available for education regardless of a community's own wealth and ability to pay. The two categories of state aid which are equalized are current expense aid and debt service aid. Two other categories, transportation and categorical program aid for special education and compensatory and bilingual programs, are allocated strictly on the number of students in each category. In addition to these four categories, the state's contribution to the employee pension system (TPAF) is considered part of that district's state aid.

The amount of equalization aid a district gets from the state will depend, not only on the district's wealth, but

also on how much that board has decided to spend per pupil. Two districts, otherwise identical, may differ in their amount of state aid because one of them is taxing itself more to provide more for its students.

A board of education may also receive revenue from tuition monies coming to them from children attending their schools from other districts. These children can be in special education classes, or have been enrolled because one district offers a program their own district does not, or have entered the school prior to the family actually moving into a newly purchased home. Districts also receive Federal monies from the several Title programs, including Title I and compensatory education funds.

A final source of revenue to boards is free balance appropriation. While the state accounting office recommends that boards keep between three and five percent of their budget as surplus, districts can take some of their surplus funds, if they have any, and use them the following year to help defray the tax call on the community. This use of surplus funds shows up in the revenue column as a free appropriate balance. Such use of surplus monies, however, is included when the state figures a district's budget CAP for the following year.

A detailed and clearly written explanation of state aid can be found in *Fundamentals of Schools Board Membership*, the booklet that all new board members receive from NJSBA, in an article entitled, "The Long Distance Runner: The Board Member Runs A Long Hard Course of School Finance."

CAPS

Budget caps are state mandated limits on the annual increase in a school district's budget. These mandates were adopted by the Legislature to control the amount of state aid which would go to districts after passage of the T & E law. Otherwise, it was felt, local districts might increase their budgets at a rate beyond the state's ability to pay. School systems could, in effect, have a "blank check" on the state treasury. Caps were also intended to ensure

property tax relief by keeping school costs down and equalizing educational opportunities for children throughout New Jersey by allowing lower spending districts to increase their expenditures more rapidly than higher spending districts.

Line Item Budget

Traditionally in New Jersey budgets have been developed by boards of education in a line item format and presented in that manner to the public. The Chart of Accounts, which makes up the line item budget, is broken down as follows:

100 Series—Administration
200 Series—Instruction
300 Series—Attendance Services
400 Series—Health Services
500 Series —Pupil Transportation
600 Series—Operation of Plant
700 Series—Maintenance of Plant
800 Series—Fixed Charges
900 Series—Food Services
1000 Series—Student Body Activities
1100 Series—Community Services
1200 Series—Capital Outlay
1300 Series—Debt Service

Not all budgets will include all items. In New Jersey, for example, very few districts carry monies under the 1100 Series. The largest account in all budgets will be the 200 Series, since that includes teacher's salaries. In some districts, the 500 Series would be the next largest since busing falls into that account. In other districts, with little or no busing, that Series would be minimal. Fixed Charges, the 800 Series, is one of the most rapidly increasing portions of school budgets due to the tremendous rise in insurance costs. Some districts have experienced a 1000% increase over the past few years in fire and liability insurance rates.

The 1200 Series, or Capital Outlay, is voted on separately from the Current Expense portion of the budget.

Capital Outlay covers any expenditures which result in the acquisition of fixed assets or additions to fixed assets. These would include monies for land, improvements of grounds, construction of buildings, additions to buildings, remodeling, and initial or additional equipment. Depending on the individual district's situation, this account can be a few thousand dollars or several hundred thousand dollars.

The 1300 Series, Debt Service, is, by state law, part of the advertised school budget, although it is not voted on by the community. It includes principal and interest due on referenda previously approved by the voters to construct new schools, put additions on existing buildings, or otherwise involve the board in contracted debts. Again, districts which have recently had to expand will likely have a large Debt Service account, while those systems who have almost completed paying off their schools will have a small account, dropping rapidly toward zero.

Program Oriented Budgeting

In December, 1977, the New Jersey Administrative Code 6:20-2.3 was adopted which called for the development by the State Board of Education, and adoption by local boards of education, of program oriented budgeting. Program oriented budgeting (POB), as intended in the Code, will relate district expenditures to the goals and objectives they have developed under the T & E mandates.

A program budget portrays the school district's annual educational plan in dollars and requires the district to consider the way recources are to be allocated among programs. It should lead board members to ask questions about program intent and to relate programming decisions to recources. It provides school personnel and the community with a clearer explanation of how taxpayer dollars are being used.

Where, in a line item budget, an accout would read Instruction, in a program oriented budget such an account could be broken down into different areas such as individual costs for textbooks and materials, salaries, and equip-

ment. With such detailed information, a board can more easily relate budget expenditures to their educational goals and priorities. The emphasis is on programs rather than objects. In-depth evaluations of existing curricula and future needs are encouraged as a basis for budget development, rather than the automatic incremental approach to existing expenditures as often occurs with a line item budget.

A complete description of the mandate of the POB Code and the responsibilities of boards under that Code, can be found in another article from *Fundamentals of School Board Membership*, "Program Oriented Budgeting."

Staff Input

Budgets are not just creatures of boards of education and superintendents. All personnel in the district should have input. Budget discussions between teachers and principals in elementary schools, within departments in secondary schools, and among custodians for maintenance needs should begin in the spring, right after the election. Principals will use these discussions and the recommendations they get from their staff to put together their building budget for review by the central office administrators.

These latter administrators go over the many recommendations they receive, requests for new programs, building repairs and grounds upkeep and develop the system-wide recommendations they bring to the board. They put together the data to support their recommendations and should be able to relate these to the goals and objectives already adopted for the district. POB will make their job of gathering the relevant information for each recommendation much easier.

The board's deliberations should not be a pro forma exercise. The budget affects not only those families with children in the schools but the entire community. Boards must use all information available to determine the educational needs of the students based on their district's priorities. They will be faced at board meetings and public hearings with many citizens with differing views. "We

need more librarians." "We have too many administrators." "Why don't we have more girls sports?" "There should be a nurse for every school." "Why do we need sports . . . or driver education . . . or art and music?"

While considering all views, including their own desires to keep down the tax rate, board members must remember that their prime consideration must be an effective education for all the students in their schools. With recommendations based on staff discussions over the past several months, sufficient background data and student needs assessments, state aid figures, information on Federal monies available to the district, and a complete understanding of their own goals and objectives, boards of education should be able to strike the balance that will provide a good education for their students with a reasonable tax call on their communities.

Budget Approval

After a board has gone through the long, careful process necessary to develop a budget which meets the needs of their school system and which they feel is within the community's ability to pay, they must have this budget approved.

If the board is an appointed one, a Type I district, this is done by a Board of School Estimate made up of two school board members, two members of the governing body of the municipality, and the mayor or chief executive officer of the town. This Board will approve the budget as submitted or make changes and certify the amount of appropriation to the board of education and the governing body of the municipality, which will include the amount certified in its tax ordinance.

If the board is an elected one, a Type II district, budget approval is determined by the voters of the community. The board presents its recommended budget at a public hearing held for that purpose. The public hearing is mandated by law, even though most of the board's deliberations over the past few months would have been held in public because of the Sunshine Law. At election time,

along with voting on members for the board of education, the voters approve or disapprove the budget.

If the voters turn down the budget, the governing body of the municipality reviews it and can either leave it as is, based on the board of education's defense of the amount and information given to them by the board, or they can reduce it by the amount they feel is in keeping with the action of the voters.

In both Type I and Type II districts, if agreement on the budget cannot be reached with the Board of School Estimate or the municipality, the board may appeal any cuts to the Commissioner of Education. He can leave the amount as set by the Board of School Estimate or the municipality, or he can order it increased to what the board of education is asking for, or he can place it at any amount in between. He will make the final determination based on what he believes is necessary for a thorough and efficient education for that district's students as stated in their goals and objectives.

Budget defeats can be wrenching on a board. All of their time and effort, plus the time and effort of their administrators and staff, seem put to naught by the concern of the community about their taxes. People do care about education and about their children. Differences of opinion arise when discussion turns to what is necessary to a good education and what is a "frill." Boards should gather all the necessary information, discuss what the district's needs are, develop a budget based on those discussions, explain to the voters what they have done and why, and await the voice of the people. Defeats should not be taken personally. With the cost of living rising without end, and taxes going up, from the federal level through state and county governments, taxpayers will naturally become vocal on the one tax item closest to them.

7

Buildings and Maintenance

Long Range Plans

The 700 Account in a budget covers maintenance of buildings and contracted services for upkeep, repair, and replacement of non—curricular equipment. This Account, unfortunately, is too often the first to be cut when boards of education are reviewing budget items. It is unfortunate because maintenance needs do not go away — they just get worse. And the repair item which might cost $10,000 this year will probably cost $15,000 next year and $20,000 the year after for the same amount of work.

Boards of education are responsible for a multi-million dollar system of buildings and should think of these buildings and their maintenance the way industry does. Not only is it important to keep up with the minor repair and replacement items which crop up during the year, but a carefully planned and budgeted program of long range school preventive maintenance should be an on-going part of every system.

Too many maintenance programs for schools are reactive instead of preventive. Boards tend to "put out fires" instead of planning ahead for possible problems. Such practices are not financially or educationally sound. You wouldn't put a curriculum together that way. You can imagine the community's reaction if a board of education waited until reading and math test scores were hitting bottom before instituting needed remedial and basic skills programs.

Just as assessment of educational goals and development of objectives to meet those goals are necessary (and mandated by the T&E Law), so is the assessment of present and future maintenance needs and the development of a long-range plan with budget implications. Efficient and reliable building operation is essential to the health, safety, and comfort of pupils and teachers. Comfortable buildings and classrooms help the educational program.

Preventive maintenance procedures can avert such incidents as the student who wrote to her local paper in New Jersey recently complaining about "rats and mice falling out of (the classroom) ceiling." Or, more seriously, eliminate equipment failures which caused a student to be electrocuted in a science laboratory in Michigan. School supplies and buildings take especially hard wear and tear because of the nature and age of their users. Buying cheap is often more expensive in the long run. Good materials and supplies are worth their extra cost in the life of operation and minimal need for repairs.

What can boards of education do to insure that their school plants are in top condition, that their grounds are in good repair, and that materials and supplies are of a quality which will help the educational program?

First, boards must decide that preventive school maintenance is important. They must determine that they will stop reacting to problems in this area after they occur —accepting bids in a crisis situation or making "bandage" repairs so that the school program can continue without interruption. The business administrator and/or superintendent should be instructed to bring recommendations to the board so that policies can be adopted supporting a preventive maintenance system.

Second, after deciding that a preventive maintenance system is best, a board of education should evaluate what procedures should be operative in their district for assessing needs, making repairs, and taking care of grounds upkeep. Not only should procedures be developed and written down so that all involved in this area are aware of and familiar with them, but in-service training sessions

for personnel who oversee and perform the maintenance functions are recommended. The entire custodial staff should be involved in establishing the procedures. This can be accomplished by direct active participation in the administrative planning sessions or by solicitation of their opinions and ideas. Those involved in carrying out the plans should certainly be included in the decision-making process.

A handbook covering all aspects of the maintenance and operation of buildings and grounds, including preventive maintenance would ideally be developed, and regular in-service meetings with supervisory operational personnel might be held to cover possible problem areas before they become actual problem areas.

Third, after adopting policies, either formally or informally, and developing procedures to implement the policies, boards must put their money where their mouth is. They must back up their planning in the budget.

Too often, when the crunch comes, boards use the maintenance and capital outlay portions of the budget to "balance" the rest. Major repairs are deferred, remodeling almost unheard of, materials are cut to the bone, and the preventive maintenance program becomes one of taking care of emergencies. A study in 1976 showed that school maintenance needs divide roughly into the following areas:

Repair of buildings—58% of maintenance budget

Repair of equipment—13% of maintenance budget

Replacement of equipment—10% of maintenance budget

Upkeep of grounds—19% of maintenance budget

Boards might use this as a rule of thumb in dividing up the monies they allocate to their building and grounds portion of the budget.

As money gets tighter and voters become less willing to approve increased taxes, it becomes more and more important that boards stress long-range planning in all budget areas. Maintenance is no less important than personnel or curriculum. If the roof is falling in, if the windows are leaking, if the grounds are potted and filled with rocks, the educational program will not be able to be

conducted at its maximum effectiveness. A long range plan of preventive maintenance, with budgetary items spread out evenly over a period of years, will go a long way in avoiding emergency situations and crises in the schools.

Projecting Enrollment

In all of the sections of this book, we have emphasized the importance of planning ahead. Boards which have decided where they want to go in any area, and have discussed carefully how they will get there, will have the smoothest trip and the least number of surprises along the way. This is no less true in the area of pupil population.

In order to develop any longe-range plans for staffing needs, curricular programs, and building maintenance, boards must know how many students they can expect to be attending their schools for the years ahead. Fairly detailed estimates can be obtained for up to five years in the future, and educated estimates can be made for up to ten years ahead.

In districts with declining enrollment, which includes most of those in New Jersey, such long range plans should be a part of a community information and involvement effort. Like getting a divorce, there is no really good way to close a school. But there are methods which can be employed which will soften the blow and will leave the disputing parties on speaking terms with each other afterwards. Keeping your townspeople aware of student numbers will lessen the shock when the time comes, as it inevitably will, to close schools.

The most important element is time. If a board of education announces in March that one of their schools will close the following September, they can be assured of a violent reaction in the community in opposition. Such a time period does not allow for people to learn all the facts, voice their opinions, get used to the idea, and generally let off steam. Boards should be looking ahead. Preferably, three years prior to a final decision to close a school, a broad-based committee should have been appointed. This committee, made up of citizens from all sections of the

community, would be charged to collect data on student numbers, conduct a needs assessment of building usage, develop criteria for programs and class size, and make recommendations for building and classroom use over the next next five to ten years. Their report, containing the information gathered and their recommendations, should be a public document and opportunity for extensive public discussion should be made. Public hearings should be held to receive positive and negative reactions to the proposals.

At the beginning, when this committee is first appointed, the board should make clear that all final decisions on the recommendations will be made by the board. As the representatives of the community they connot shirk their responsibility and place the burden of decision-making on others. They should study the report carefully, listen to the comments of those attending the public hearings, have their administrators add their recommendations, and make their decisions based on what is best for the district as a whole. And, once the decision is made, *stick to it,* regardless of the political fallout which will follow.

The whole process, from the formation of the committee to the decision by the board to close, or not to close, a building or buildings, should take at least a year. And the community should have a year's notice before the closing takes place. For example, in September, 1980, a committee would be formed, their report to the board would be made in March, 1981, hearings would be held through the Spring, and the board would make their decision by June, 1981. If a building were to be closed, it would be closed as of June, 1982,

In those districts where enrollment is on the upswing, the concerns center around overcrowded classrooms, double sessions, and the need for more classroom space. This may lead to a building referendum. The need here may be more immediate, but the issues are more straightforward than those raised in the closing of a school. Why do we need a new school and how much is it going to cost? The process described previously of a town-wide committee, studies and recommendations, public hearings, and a

board decision, is also recommended for a growing community.

The important point to remember in both instances is that people want to be informed, they want to feel a part of a decision which will affect them and their children, and they want to believe that the board of education is not trying to sneak something past them. Being open and honest with your community, sharing with them all the information you can gather, and letting them in on your decision-making process will go a long way towards gaining their support and keeping their respect. They may not all agree with your decision, but most of your citizens will defend your right to make it.

8

Labor Relations

Bargaining Units

Although school board members are elected or appointed to make policy determinations concerning the operation of their districts, there are many restraints on this policy-making function. One of the most significant restraints is the obligation of school boards to bargain in good faith with organizations representing school personnel over wages, hours, and working conditions. Over 99% of New Jersey teachers and a great proportion of support personnel belong to bargaining units. Less than 25% of private sector employees are union members. There are approximately 1300 bargaining units representing school employees and about 65% of an average district's budget is reflected in their salaries. Another 10% to 15% is reflected in fringe benefits. Almost all of these wages and benefits are determined through collective negotiations.

The only employees forbidden by law to be included in bargaining unit are superintendents, assistant superintendents, and confidential employees. Confidential employees are employees of a school disrict who regularly and consistently perform duties of a confidential nature in the area of labor relations or personnel relations. Generally, these are secretaries who type memos, labor agreements, disciplinary review memos and other related jobs.

Employee organizations and employers must negotiate in good faith concerning terms and conditions of employment. Wages, fringe benefits, and hours are easily definable as terms and conditions. Other areas are not as easily defined, however, and in August, 1978, the New Jersey Supreme Court, in a case involving Ridgefield Park

School District, declared illegal many areas of negotiations previously deemed permissive by PERC.

PERC

PERC is the Public Employment Relations Commission, a state agency responsible for overseeing labor relations in New Jersey which involve public employers and employees. As such, it conducts elections to determine who the majority representative of employees is, determines whether either employers or employee organizations have committed unfair practices, determines what topics may be negotiated, and assists the parties in reaching contract settlements through the use of mediators and fact finders. The Commission is made up of seven members: two labor representatives, two employer representatives and three neutrals. One of the neutrals is the Chairman of the Commission.

The purpose of a labor contract is to limit the ability of management to take certain kinds of actions. Think about that statement! The purpose of a labor contract is to limit the ability of management to take certain kinds of actions. All labor contracts are restrictive on the employer. Successful negotiations limits these restrictions. Most school districts enter into one year agreements with their employees. Some, however, enter into two or three year agreements. A contract, once signed, is very difficult to change. Even the smallest portion of a labor agreement can be critical to a school district at some time and should not be entered into lightly.

The legal requirement to bargain in good faith does not mean that, on any given topic, either party must make a concession. As long as a party is open to suggestions and as long as they want to reach a mutual agreement with the other party, saying "No" is still considered bargaining in good faith.

Team Make-Up

Collective bargaining is an adversary procedure. The object of collective bargaining is to reach a contract. To

accomplish this, both sides must fully understand the negotiations process and be able to represent their sides viewpoint. The outcome of successful negotiations is to produce a result with which both sides can live. Rarely is either side totally pleased with the outcome of the process. This adversary relationship can be disconcerting to those not familiar with the process of negotiations. Since we rarely do well in those endeavors with which we are neither familiar nor comfortable, it is very important that boards choose their negotiating team carefully. It is absolutely vital that they select a spokesperson who is experienced and knowledgeable in the area of public sector negotiations.

Chief spokespersons fall into three main categories: board members, outside professionals, or trained administrators. Many boards appoint one of their board members to be their negotiations spokesperson, especially in small districts. The reason for the use of a board member stems from the savings realized—after all, board members do not get paid. However, unless their regular job entails public sector negotiations, they are most likely not as well trained nor as familiar with the constantly changing laws and PERC decisions, as are those from the other two categories.

Some boards hire an outside, professional negotiator to be their spokesperson. These lawyers and labor relations consultants concentrate on handling collective bargaining for boards of education and municipalities. They charge by the hour or a flat fee, but their expertise and experience is often worth the dollars spent. Seemingly cost-free items, agreed to by inexperienced bargainers, can turn out to be very expensive for the district in future years.

The ideal person, for those districts who have the staff available, is a central office administrator trained to handle negotiations. This administrator should not be the superintendent, but perhaps an assistant superintendent for personnel or an administrative coordinator. The advantages of an in-house person to handle negotiations are many. He is familiar with the district and its concerns, he works through-out the year with the principals and knows

their problems, he will be responsible for administering the contract and so will not be agreeing to items he knows can be troublesome later, he will handle grievances at the administrative level and thus will be familiar with contract weaknesses when the next year's round of negotiations begins. He can be in charge of tuition reimbursements, requests for sabbaticals, and all personnel matters growing out of contractual agreements. Such familiarity and year-round experience cannot be gained by any board member or outside professional. His salary may pay for itself.

Determining Parameters

No one individual board member has the right, responsibility or authority to determine contractual items prior to or during negotiations. The board as a whole should determine what proposals they will bring to the table and what responses their negotiating team will make to the employee organization's proposals. These latter items can be tentatively listed as acceptable, unacceptable, or possible pending discussions during bargaining. NJSBA's Labor Relations Department would be the first to tell you that the cardinal rule of negotiations is, "Never say 'Never'." Leave your team negotiating room. Changes will be necessary during the negotiations process and the team should make frequent and regular reports to the rest of the board. However, basic parameters and money totals should be established at the beginning by the whole board.

Negotiations is one of the listed exemptions under the Sunshine Law and board discussions of team selection, parameters, and employee demands should be held in closed session. If the employee organizations knew what the board limits were, they would never agree to anything less.

Impasse And Mediation

When the board and one of the bargaining units are unable to reach a mutual agreement, they declare an 'impasse'. In no way does this mean that the board's team

is negotiating poorly. Indeed, they are most probably simply refusing to give in to demands which are either too expensive for the district or would diminish the board's management prerogatives. Both sides then call upon PERC to supply them with a mediator. The mediator is a neutral person, employed by the state or by PERC, to assist public employers and employee organizations to reach agreements. The mediator has no power to force an agreement. They use techniques gained through years of experience to redirect the parties, cut through bargaining rhetoric and personalities, and suggest new ways of compromise that may bring about an agreement. They are not interested in right or wrong, good or bad for the district. They are only interested in getting an agreement.

If mediation fails, the parties may use the services of a fact finder, also supplied by PERC, who will hold a hearing on the items in dispute. The fact finder makes a determination of the settlement he believes most appropriate, which may be a middle ground between the two sides. It is not a finding of fact. Fact finders also have no power to force a settlement. If fact finding does not resolve the dispute, there is no other remedy employed by PERC. Generally, the parties go back to the bargaining table and continue, sometimes into the next school year, and occasionally, into the school year two years hence.

Contract Administration

Once a contract has been agreed to and signed by both parties, it becomes binding upon the district and all those covered by it or empowered to implement it.

All principals, department heads, and supervisors should be made thoroughly familiar with the contract and its provisions. Poor contract administration is the major cause of staff grievances and low morale. Training for district personnel responsible for carrying out the contract should be a mainstay of administrative in-service programs. Improper administration can bring on arbitration decisions against a district which can erode management options.

All district administrators should keep careful note of those contract areas which bring them difficulty or which they think ill-advised. The superintendent should be sure that the negotiating team for the following year is familiar with these items and that they attempt to adjust the new contract accordingly.

Tenure

All teachers, principals, assistant principals, vice principals, superintendents, assistant superintendents, school nurses, indeed all personnel who are required to hold appropriate certificates are protected by the tenure statutes of New Jersey. Tenure may also be granted at a board's discretion, to personnel not required to hold certificates—such as custodians.

Generally speaking, an employee earns tenure in a district after employment for three consecutive calendar years, on the first day of the fourth academic year. Tenure of staff members is not affected by any change in the method of government of the school district. All principals, teachers and other employees in a school district which is dissolved as the result of the formation of a regional or consolidated district must be continued in their employment in the new district with their rights to tenure, pension and accumulated sick leave unaffected.

However, these laws relating to tenure do not limit the right of any board of education to reduce the number of teaching staff members employed in the district whenever, in the board's judgment, it is advisable to abolish any positions for reasons of economy or because of a reduction in the number of pupils or a change in the administrative organization of the district, or for any other good cause. Reduction of tenured teaching staff members must be made on the basis of seniority according to standards established by the commissioner. Teachers so dismissed must be placed on a preferred eligibility list for reemployment when vacancies occur.

No employee of a board of education, who has acquired tenure, may be dismissed except for inefficiency,

incapacity, unbecoming conduct or other just cause, and then only after written charges have been preferred against him and a hearing held before the Commissioner of Education. This statement does not sound too difficult of operation, but the reality is that in the past few years only a handful of teachers have actually been dismissed by the Commissioner after having charges brought against them by a local board. The procedure is cumbersome, extremely time-consuming—extending three years in some cases—and costly.

The reality also is that, unless a district has at least three years of written evaluations, showing that they have prescribed goals for the staff member, worked with him on those goals, and consistently evaluated that staff member as failing to achieve those goals, having provided warnings all along the way, the Commissioner is unlikely to find that the teacher should be fired, except in extreme cases—usually involving harm to a child.

All nontenured staff members must be observed and evaluated in the performance of their duties at least three times during each school year, such evaluations to take place before April 30th of each year, when they must be notified whether their contracts will be renewed or not. Non-tenured staff may be let go on the basis of merit, rather than seniority as required for tenured staff.

The most important piece of advice I can give you regarding tenure is: EVALUATE, EVALUATE, EVALUATE! The problem with tenure is not solely with the law, but also with the looseness of evaluations by principals and central office administrators. As in many other areas of life, if you have the materials to prove your case, your chances of doing so are greatly enhanced.

9

Public Relations

Community Relations

Any endeavor or business will operate more smoothly and with greater cooperation if there is respect and understanding among those involved. This is no less true for boards of education and their communities.

The process by which boards attempt to keep their citizens informed is called public relations or community relations. The term "public relations" sometimes has a Madison Avenue connotation. Schools are perceived by some as "selling" rather than "informing" and, indeed, that is sometimes the case.

Community relations is a two-way street, as recognized in the National School Public Relations Association definition:

> Educational public relations is a management function which interprets public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to encourage public involvement and to earn public understanding and acceptance.

Not only should boards keep their publics informed of their discussions and actions, but the public should be encouraged to make their voice heard and take part, where appropriate, in the system.

Community relations is also more than sharing information with just those outside the schools. Teachers, principals, secretaries, and custodians need to be aware of board policies and measures taken. They deal with and speak to parents on a daily basis. Being uninformed does not stop them from disseminating information as they

respond to inquiries. Accuracy of information and encouragement of input should start with your staff. Personnel relations is a two-way street, too.

Board members are often concerned about their image. Unfortunately, this concern tends to surface only at election time. That is much too late. The building of good relations and a positive image of board decision-making should be an on-going, year-long, comprehensive process. It must include all those involved in the schools, from staff to parents to students, and it must reach all those in the community, from senior citizens to new arrivals. Dealing with the community on a crisis basis is as effective as putting out pails under a leak—you may stop the water from spreading, but you haven't done a thing about the rotten roof.

Personal Contact

Public relations is more than just a well-planned program of information dissemination, press releases, and pamphlets sent home two or three times a year. Surveys investigating public attitudes toward schools, including the Gallup Poll, have shown that the primary scource of public information on education is personal contact with those in the school system. If the public perceives from their contacts that those in the schools are interested in their concerns, open to their suggestions, courteous and helpful when called, then their overall impression of the schools will be positive.

Board members play an important part in developing this positive impression. The manner in which you conduct yourself at meetings says a lot to those present. Are you courteous to each other and to the members of the public who address you? Do you solicit opinions and recommendations from your administrators? Do you comment on the issues under discussion rather than on the personalities of those involved in the issues? Is there a sense of working together for the school system rather than taking sides for political purposes? A "no" to any of these questions means that the image you are presenting to the

public is not the best. If you think there is room for improvement in this area for your board, you might include discussion of board meeting conduct at a self-evaluation session.

Outside of meetings, board members remain in frequent contact with people in the community. They call you on the phone with problems and complaints; you meet them in supermarkets and at the Rotary and Kiwanis meetings; you see them at PTA functions and on the bus going to work. How you react to their questions, comments, and demands that you act in this way or that will go a long way in shaping their view of the board as a whole. Promising to take care of the problem is rarely the answer. An individual board member has no authority to act and, in most instances, the issue will be administrative and even the board as a whole would not properly get involved. You should be familiar with board policies and procedures and be able to help people reach the staff person who will best be able to help them or answer their questions.

In all of your dealings with the people in your community, an honest concern coupled with a knowledge of your system and how it functions will go a long way toward keeping the public's view of the board of education a positive one.

Program Objectives

For those townspeople who attend meetings and who take the initiative to call board members or contact them in other ways, certainly personal contact is the greatest part of their impression of the board. However, for the rest of the community, what they read in the newspaper, hear on the radio or television, or receive in the mail from the schools, forms the basis of their opinion.

In terms of public relations, what has been said here and what will be recommended assumes some basic facts: that your school system is a good one, that it is based on a set of goals which expresses the philosophy of the board and the community, that students graduated from the schools are prepared to function effectively as citizens, and

that the staff is competent and supported with materials and resources necessary to do an effective job. No PR program ever developed will cover up a poor educational program or hide a badly administered school system. If the schools don't educate well, the communications program will not be successful.

Having set that basic, there are definite steps a school board should take to communicate to their public why and how their tax monies are being spent. Boards should publicly commit themselves to a public relations program and be willing to provide the resources and time necessary to make it work. Depending on the size of the district, a volunteer from one of the PTA's, a staff member hired just for this purpose, or a person in another existing position may be designated as the one in charge. There are always many able people in the schools themselves and many talented citizens in the community who are willing to become involved.

A balanced, effective program should be developed which carries out the district's philosophy and which encourages two-way communication. The media available in the area should be used—newspapers, local radio and television stations, even cable television which usually have public service channels with time open for local programs.

The objectives of a good public relations program are to provide an honest, comprehensive flow of information about the activities of the schools and the policies and actions of the board to the community and to provide a channel whereby concerns and problems of the community are brought to the attention of the proper authorities in the schools. The program should help to maintain the town's confidence in their schools, make them aware of the chain-of-command, anticipate and forestall problems that arise from a lack of proper information and understanding, and emphasize the reality that the schools belong to the community and that citizens should all feel that they share in their function and success.

Several good articles on the actual implementation of a successful public relations program can be found in *Fundamentals of School Board Membership.*

School districts used to take for granted the support of the people in their towns. With inflation, rising taxes, dropping test scores, and increasing union activities, this automatic support can no longer be assumed. Budget defeats become the rule rather than the exception and angry confrontations with parents at board meetings occur more often as enrollment declines and schools are closed. The public today is more sophisticated, more involved in their children's education, and more willing to stand up and be critical when they see something they don't like. Sidney P. Marland, Jr., former assistant secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, has said: "The number one priority facing the schools today is to reinstill public confidence in the public school." Certainly a well-thought out, well developed, and well supported public relations program will help.

10

New Jersey School Boards Association

NJSBA

A non-profit, state-mandated organization, the New Jersey School Boards Association is a federation of all the state's local school boards. It serves as advocate for the interests of New Jersey's public school students and school districts, and provides in-service training and technical assistance for the state's over 5,000 board of education members.

NJSBA works with board members to provide the best available information and management services and training to assist them in carrying out their varied and expanding responsibilities. In addition, NJSBA works with other organizations involved in education to further the aims of public education state-wide and nationally. NJSBA acts as the voice of the children before our governing bodies in describing how they and their schools will be affected by proposed regulations and legislation.

Services to boards of education, administrators, individual board members, board attorneys, and anyone involved in public education are provided by different departments within NJSBA. Each works in their area to provide the best in training, information, resources, and advice.

Executive Office

The Executive Office is responsible for overall management of all Association operations. These include:

keeping the Association's membership informed about all educational theories and practices in districts throughout the state and nation; implementing major policy decisions directed by the Delegate Assembly; providing representation at meetings, conferences, and hearings where board interests are involved; providing liaison with the State Department of Education and other educational organizations; and presenting the school board point of view to other state and national groups.

Communications

The Communications Department maintains a continuous flow of information to and from school board members and NJSBA staff, as well as professional educators, officials, media and the citizens of New Jersey. Through conferences, publications, and staff consultants they promote effective school public relations programs and encourage local boards to develop and maintain open communications with students, staff and public. This department also seeks to inform citizens of the state about public education by bringing current educational issues and trends to their attention in the media.

Field Services

The Field Services Department provides direct services to local boards of education. They operate from regional locations around New Jersey, with an office in Denville, Hammonton, Marlboro and Trenton. The department also works closely with county school boards associations to provide these groups with educational communication services that help foster their strength and unity with the state Association.

Governmental Relations

The Governmental Relations Department represents school boards before the State Legislature, the State Board of Education, Congress, the Governor's office and other state and federal agencies which can affect public educa-

tion. The department's four lobbyists attend every meeting of the Senate, Assembly, and State Board of Education, as well as all meetings of legislative committees which consider bills affecting public education. They meet regularly with state legislators to keep them aware of Association positions which derive from resolutions approved by the Delegate Assembly. All legislation is analyzed for its possible impact on public schools and boards are kept informed when action is needed to encourage or prevent passage of bills.

Inservice Education

The Inservice Education Department plans, develops, and conducts training and informational conferences, seminars and regional meetings for board of education members and administrators. Programs and materials are designed to meet needs in the areas of new member orientation, leadership skills, educational trends, budgets, and current issues affecting boards. The department is also responsible for putting together and running the Annual Workshop, a virtual compendium of educational concerns in itself.

Labor Relations

The Labor Relations Department maintains an expert staff and the necessary resource data to aid boards in all aspects of the negotiations process. All developments, research and trends in the field are monitored and reported to board members. In conjunction with the Legal Department, this department becomes directly involved in precedent setting court cases and/or administrative hearings, particularly in decisions concerning the scope of negotiations. They provide consultation services to boards and will give direct on-site service during strikes.

Legal

The Legal Department maintains a staff whose primary responsibility is to address the many legal issues facing

boards of education. They focus their main efforts on issues of statewide importance which are common to all boards. Direct intervention may be called for in those education and labor cases where the precedent set will be of substantial importance statewide. This department also drafts legislation to implement Association objectives and maintains extensive files for the use of school board attorneys.

Management Information

The Management Information Department provides materials and assistance to Association committees, local boards, individual members, and their administrative staffs in four broad categories: general information on problems common to school systems; information and advice on policy-making; statistical information and research; and in-depth synthesis of information on topics of immediate concern. Their library is available to all board members and their policy service helps boards keep their manuals current and workable.

Information about publications available from the various departments of NJSBA can be obtained by calling the Business Department.